

**CITY OF GREENBELT, MARYLAND
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Michael P. McLaughlin, City Manager *MPM*
FROM: Celia W. Craze, Director
DATE: September 21, 2012
SUBJECT: Preliminary Greenbelt Metro Area and MD 193 Corridor Sector Plan and Proposed Sectional Map Amendment

Following a 14 month public participation process, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) has published its draft Preliminary Greenbelt Metro Area and MD 193 Corridor Sector Plan and Proposed Sectional Map Amendment. This plan is intended to update the 2001 Greenbelt Metro Area Approved Sector Plan and Sectional Map Amendment.

The District Council and Planning Board will be accepting comments on the plan until October 17, 2012. There will be a public hearing on the plan on October 2, 2012 at 7 p.m. at the County Administration Building. Council members wishing to speak at the meeting should be registered in advance. There will be a time limit for all speakers.

Following review of public comments, the project schedule calls for Planning Board adoption in December 2012, and District Council approval in February 2013.

Staff is planning to review major elements, issues and concerns with the plan at the upcoming work session on September 26. At Council's direction, staff will prepare comments for each Councilmember who plans to testify at the October 2 joint public hearing. Staff will attend the public hearing but will not be testifying.

Based on the discussion during the upcoming work session, as well as the analysis staff has completed, staff will prepare a detailed list of comments on the plan. This comprehensive analysis and discussion of the plan will be presented to Council at the Regular Council meeting on Tuesday, October 9. Staff will also prepare a draft cover letter for transmittal of the formal position to the District Council and Planning Board. Following Council's action on October 9, the official position of the City Council will be submitted to M-NCPPC prior to the October 17, 2012 deadline.

Planning staff was deeply involved in the public participation process, and attended many staff level meetings during plan formulation. Council members were equally engaged in the process. Concepts which were inconsistent with City Council positions, goals defined in the Council strategic plan, and visions for the City which have evolved over many years of plan review, were identified and discussed with M-NCPPC technical staff. In addition, planning staff expressed thoughts and opinions reflective of our professional judgment and knowledge of Greenbelt.

It is unfortunate that many of the substantive issues addressed in the plan either ignore comments made by staff and Council during the plan formulation, and/or directly conflict with policy decisions and positions previously adopted by the City Council. For the reasons which will be listed below, staff will be recommending that the City Council not support the preliminary sector plan and sectional map amendment.

Following is a brief list of the major issues and areas of disagreement that staff has identified in the plan:

- The plan proposes rezoning Beltway Plaza from C-S-C to M-U-I. M-U-I is a flexible design zone which derives its rules, standards and guidelines from the Development District Overlay Zone (DDOZ). The plan places Beltway Plaza in the DDOZ, but then exempts the property from the guidelines specified for properties in the Development District.
- The plan recommends redevelopment of the Greenway Center and Maryland Trade Center as a mixed use development designed according to New Urbanist practices. There is no justification for the complete redevelopment of a vibrant retail/office complex which generates a significant amount of tax revenue for the city and county.
- Throughout the plan, the design emphasis is on redevelopment following a New Urbanist pattern. While New Urbanism designs can create attractive, livable areas, this plan overuses the concepts, and fails to recognize that design of any type, is most successful when it considers the site and context of the development. Greenbelt is not a New Urbanist community, but it is a model of applying a variety of design elements to create a unique and context sensitive community.
- This plan could be characterized as the redevelopment plan for the Greenbelt Road corridor. Not only is justification for any redevelopment weak, the plan lacks specifics about the type, scale, magnitude and impact of these proposed changes. Staff finds this plan lacking in specificity and justification.
- The plan recommends the complete reconstruction of the Greenbelt Road/Kenilworth Avenue interchange to replace with a new concept called a Diverging Diamond. It may be true that a Diverging Diamond interchange design is safer and more efficient than cloverleaf and jug handle interchanges which characterize much of this country's high volume/high speed roadway intersections. That does not create the justification for reconstruction of a functioning interchange. Capital investments need to be directed to

improvements, and not replacements which appear to be properly functioning.

- This plan supports widening of Kenilworth Avenue, which is contrary to Council's long stated position. Further, it recommends widening Hanover Parkway from 2 to 4 lanes from Hanover Drive to Good Luck Road. This contradicts Council's vision that Hanover Parkway be retained with 2 lanes. The plan also recommends changing the alignment of Greenbelt Station Parkway (North-South Connector Road), from the alignment approved by City Council and reflected approved Preliminary Plan of Subdivision, Conceptual Site Plan, grade establishment plans, approved permits for local construction, and the city's development agreement. Staff is not aware of any problems with the approved alignment of this road, and it should be left as it has been approved.
- City staff has debated with M-NCPPC technical staff the legal status of approved Conceptual Site Plans (CSP's) in the planning area. The technical staff argues that CSP's "run with the land" and "vest" a property owner with property rights which cannot be modified through a sectional map amendment. Staff is uncomfortable with the continuation of the CSP for Springhill Lake (now Franklin Park) which allows doubling of the number of units. Mr. Manzi has been consulted on these questions, and he and staff agree that approved CSP's in the absence of actual construction consistent with the CSP, have no special vesting or ownership of the zoning. Staff recommends that Mr. Manzi be asked to pursue this issue with M-NCPPC counsel.
- The plan fails to recognize that the city is the primary service provider to its residents, and does not evaluate impact of any of its recommendations on city service.
- The plan calls for additional retail, office, hotel and residential development, but does not explain what, where or how much of anything. At an early point in plan visioning, technical staff had an option which would increase the city's housing stock by 10,000 dwelling units. This would be a doubling of housing in Greenbelt.
- It has been proposed that Hanover Parkway be branded the "Medical Mile", which would provide an identity to that corridor. Staff does not believe branding of Hanover Parkway is needed, and the suggestion of a medical mile is a forced theme.

This is a list of major concerns of staff, which we believe are of a magnitude that this plan should not be supported. There are positive aspects of the plan, and these will be reviewed with Council during the September 26 work session.